

147
AN ADDRESS TO OUR FELLOW MEMBERS

OF

THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

ON THE SUBJECT OF

SLAVERY AND THE SLAVE-TRADE

IN

THE WESTERN WORLD,

BY

THE PHILADELPHIA FREE PRODUCE ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS.

PHILADELPHIA:

1849.

ADDRESS.

About two hundred and eighty years have passed away since the declaration was triumphantly announced in a British court, that the air of England was too pure for a slave to breathe in.* But the declaration was applied to a Russian, and not to a negro slave. In that reign, the first Englishman who engaged in the African slave-trade, carried his guilty traffic to the shores of that ill-fated continent; and from that time to this, with perhaps some short intermissions, the civilized nations of Europe have prosecuted a trade in the persons of the ignorant and barbarous inhabitants of Africa. Nearly two hundred and thirty years have elapsed since the Dutch ship first presented to the English planters on James' river, their small cargo of negro slaves. From which commencement, the traffic has advanced till half the States in the Union are blackened by its products.

More than forty years have been added to the days that are gone, since the British Parliament and the American Congress enacted, almost simultaneously, their laws prohibiting the employment of British or American vessels in this guilty traffic.

In the treaty of Ghent, by which the last war with Great Britain was brought to a close, the contracting parties declared the traffic in slaves to be irreconcilable with the principles of humanity and justice; expressed their desire to promote its entire abolition; and agreed to use their best endeavors to accomplish this desirable object. In the Ashburton treaty, the same contracting powers mutually engaged to keep in operation a specified naval force, for the purpose of suppressing this illegal commerce. In 1820, the federal government denounced the African slave trade as piracy, and prescribed the punishment of death for those American citizens

* In the 11th of Elizabeth, or in the year 1570.

who should be found engaged in it. And a law, of similar import, was, a few years later, enacted by the British Parliament, to come into force on the first day of 1825. The English ministry have negotiated treaties with nearly all the maritime powers of Europe, in which the extinction of that nefarious traffic is made a prominent object.

In pursuance of the purpose to which these treaties relate, the British and American governments have maintained, at a heavy expense of treasure and life, a strong naval force, to cruise in the waters contiguous to the shores of Africa, where the slave trade is prosecuted. Still, if we are to believe the uncontradicted statements of numerous officers, whose means of information are ample, this blood-stained traffic is still carried on as vigorously, and to fully as great an extent as when Wilberforce first opened, to the House of Commons, the abominations of the traffic, and moved for leave to introduce a bill for its abolition; and the horrors of the middle passage appear to be greater now, than they were before Sir William Dolben's bill was enacted for regulating the number of slaves which might be allowed to vessels of a specified tonnage. We have, indeed, abundant evidence, that the means which have been adopted for the suppression of the trade, while they have been almost impotent in regard to their primary object, have powerfully contributed to augment the sufferings and mortality attendant on the transit from Africa to the Western world. The vessels usually employed in this trade, are constructed, not with a view to the convenient and comfortable accommodation of their living cargo, but with a view to rapid sailing. Instances, indeed, are not wanting, of slaves being stowed away in such manner as to elude the search of naval officers who visit and examine their floating dungeons; and, in some instances, they are even said to be thrown into the ocean, when other methods of concealing them become hopeless.

It is generally admitted that the African slave-trade stands distinguished from all other operations, to which the name of commerce is applied, for the suffering which it entails on its victims, and for the speed which it adds to the march of death. And the experience of more than thirty years has nearly pro-

duced a conviction in the minds of the most attentive observers, that this desolating commerce cannot be extinguished by an armed intervention.

It is an acknowledged principle in political economy, that a trade cannot be suppressed by force, when its profits are more than sufficient to cover the losses and risk of detection; and this is confessedly the case with the trade in question.

An able writer, in a recent periodical, has entered into an elaborate argument to show that the cause why the slave trade between Africa and Brazil, which appears to be the great market for slaves, continues to be lucrative, is the ignorance and barbarism of the African population. He lays it down as an established fact, that the natural resources of Africa are not inferior to those of Brazil; and that the labor of man applied to the development of those resources would be no less productive in the former than in the latter country, if guided by equal intelligence. It consequently follows, that all the destruction of life and diminution of physical ability, attendant upon the transportation of the laborers across the Atlantic, would be an absolute loss, if labor was equally available in the eastern and western continents. But while the mass of the African population remain in their present state of ignorance and barbarism, the value of labor, and consequently, of the bones and sinews which supply it, must be small; and hence the laborers, considered as articles of trade, may bear the cost and deterioration of a transit across the intervening ocean. From this view of the subject, an inference is drawn, that one of the most effectual methods of extinguishing the African slave-trade is to extend to that continent the blessings of civilization, and the benefits of lawful and peaceful commerce. The African Institution was formed in the spring of 1807, shortly after the British act for abolishing the slave-trade was passed. The object of that association was to improve the temporal condition and moral faculties of the natives; to diffuse knowledge, and to excite industry, by methods suited to the peculiar situation and manners of the inhabitants; to watch the execution of the laws enacted for abolishing the traffic in slaves; and, finally,

to introduce the blessings of civilized society among the inhabitants of that extensive continent.

Here was unquestionably an object worthy of the attention of the philanthropists who engaged in it ; among whom, Granville Sharpe, though upwards of seventy years of age, held a conspicuous place. Yet more than forty years have elapsed since this institution was formed, and little, comparatively, has been accomplished.*

The continent of Africa, with some exceptions of no great extent, is still occupied by an uncivilized and degraded race ; and the traffic in its native population, which is still prosecuted by the more enlightened, but scarcely more humanized inhabitants of Europe and America, powerfully contributes to the perpetuation of the barbarism on which it depends. However desirable and important the civilization of that continent must appear, considerable time must unquestionably elapse before it can be effected. The deleterious character of the climate to constitutions of the Caucasian race, must exclude nearly, if not totally, all active laborers, but those of African descent, from the country. Hence we are brought to the melancholy conclusion, that if the extinction of the African slave-trade is to depend upon, and arise out of, African civilization, years, if not ages, must glide away before this object is attained. Two effects are to be produced, each of which appears necessary to the accomplishment of the other. The civilization of Africa would abolish the trade in slaves ; and the abolition of the trade would facilitate the work of civilization.

This method of extirpating this iniquitous commerce, being confessedly and painfully tardy in its operation, we may the

*It is not intended, by this remark, to depreciate, in any degree, the benefits conferred on the neighboring tribes by the settlements at Sierra Leone and Liberia. And it is devoutly to be wished that the intercourse between the colonists and the native population had always been of a character which we could cordially approve. Yet, after all the labor and expense bestowed on these colonies, we are constrained to admit that the work of African civilization, through their instrumentality, is too slow to authorize a sanguine expectation that the present generation will witness much impression on the slave trade through their influence.

more readily assent to the adoption of other expedients, which are also evidently slow. If, then, we look a little nearer home, and examine on what foundation the system of slavery rests, and of what it consists, we cannot fail to observe that the traffic in slaves is merely one of its appendages ; and although this trade concentrates, in a small compass, a greater amount of misery than we find in any other quarter, it is slavery itself which creates the demand which the trade is designed to supply. And we may readily perceive that as far as religion or morality is concerned, the evils which the people and government of Great Britain and the United States are laboring to remove or redress, lies essentially, not in the transportation of laborers from one part of the world to another, but in the reduction of men, whom the Creator has endowed with the same rights as ourselves, into the degraded condition of slaves. The essence of the crime, which those governments have declared to be piracy, is the reduction of freemen to slavery. And whether that transmutation is effected, as Sir John Hawkins effected it, by the arms of the traders themselves, or whether it is effected through the instrumentality of the native chiefs, who are bribed to make merchandize of their countrymen by the expectation or promise of the productions of civilized arts, the crime is intrinsically the same.

It is the demand for slaves which sustains the trade ; and, as already intimated, while the demand remains to be sufficiently urgent to afford a profit to the trader, more than equivalent to the loss and risk, means will be found to meet that demand. If the means of cutting off that demand are slow in their operation, that is no more than may be said of every other mode which has yet been suggested.

What, then, let us enquire, is it that supports slavery in all its ramifications ? The answer is obvious and brief. It is the market for the products of servile slave labor. It would be a waste of time to enter into an argument to prove that the slave trade would cease without the intervention of a naval force, and slavery itself would expire, if the markets of the world could be closed against those products. Why do the planters of Brazil and of Cuba continue to purchase slaves from the

traders, but because they find in the markets of Europe and America a demand for their sugars? And why do the planters in Mississippi and Louisiana hold their slaves, and replenish their gangs from the States further north, but because their sugar and cotton furnish a remunerating return for their disbursements?

Now, though each individual contributes but little toward supporting the wide spread system of slavery, we are not to forget that the whole fabric of slavery, including the African trade, with the desolating wars that supply its victims, and the internal traffic from one of the United States to the other, is supported by individuals. The influence of each individual, whose custom swells the demand for the products of slave labor, not only operates to the direct support of the system, but contributes indirectly to the same end by giving countenance to the practice. It is impossible to calculate the effect of individual example, especially when supported by sound and unanswerable moral reasons. It is said that there was a time when Anthony Benezet stood almost alone in the city of Philadelphia on the question of slavery; and yet, before he was gathered to his fathers, the people of Pennsylvania had declared, through their Legislative Assembly, that no more slaves should be born in the State, and that such as were introduced from other States, should, after the lapse of six months, find themselves emancipate and free.

In the spring of 1847, the legislature of the same commonwealth, without a dissenting voice, enacted a law, in consequence of which any slave coming into the State with the consent of his master becomes instantly free.

The maxim that public opinion governs the world, has been often repeated, and loses none of its force by repetition or age. And public opinion is often directed by the action of a few master spirits. And, perhaps, we should not be far from the truth if we were to assert that public opinion may always be led in the path which truth and soberness indicate. Though errors of opinion and practice are often permitted long to prevail, the truth, when fairly presented to view, possesses a force, to which error, however intrenched, must eventually yield.

Now, on the great question of slavery itself, the civilized world has, with inconsiderable exceptions, come to an agreement; but, with regard to the mode of effecting its extinction, some diversity of opinion prevails. Yet, if we soberly examine the subject, we can scarcely escape the conclusion that this diversity of opinion is the result of inattention, or a blind acquiescence with the opinions and practices of those who have gone before us.

On the simple question whether slavery and the slave trade would continue for a year, if the markets of the world were closed against the products of slave labor, there can scarcely be a momentary difference of opinion. We may safely and confidently assert that the system of negro slavery could not be sustained in North or South America without the support of those who neither hold slaves themselves, nor acknowledge a right in others to hold them.

While, on both sides the Atlantic, the public voice denounces the system of negro slavery as cruel, unjust and impolitic, the very people who cry out against it, supply the capital and the encouragement to continue it.

When John Woolman, in the morning of his day, found his mind engaged to advocate the rights of the sable race, he was not long in arriving at the conclusion that he ought to withhold his support from the market for the products of their labor. He accordingly refrained from indulging his palate with the sweets which he knew were extorted from their uncompensated toil. Free sugar was then almost, if not altogether, unknown, and the alternative was therefore between total abstinence and the support of slavery. He decided upon the former; and even on his death bed, he made it a condition that nothing should be administered to him which came through polluted channels or oppressive hands. So delicate was his sensibility on this subject that, anticipating the probability that the progress of his disease might impair his understanding, he requested that if such should be the case, nothing might be given to him which those about him knew he had a testimony against.

One branch of the testimony which this pure-spirited disciple was constrained to bear, and which, for a time, he appears to have borne almost alone, has been taken up and incorporated into

the discipline of the society to which he belonged. It would be useless, perhaps, now to enquire how it has happened that the part of his conduct which gave to his testimony so beautiful and impressive a consistency, has been so generally overlooked. But the enquiry is important, whether we can consistently support the testimony which the society has long professed to maintain on this momentous subject, without proceeding as far as John Woolman thought it his duty to go.

The Friends who were cotemporaries with John Woolman, or a little behind him, had an arduous labor in clearing the Society of actual slaveholding : but the present generation have grown up under the auspices of freedom. During the last seventy years, a prodigious advance, in relation to this subject, has been made by the people at large, and to this progress, the labors of Friends have unquestionably contributed in an eminent degree ; yet if we enquire what advance the cause has experienced *within the society*, we have little to answer. The members have not even yet attained the position in which the pioneer in this work of reform, already named, was placed about a century ago.

The Society of Friends have had the enviable privilege of being the first to bear a united testimony against the slavery of the African race ; but we cannot suppose our mission fulfilled by merely clearing the Society of active participation in the evil. The slavery which was introduced by a less enlightened age, still continues the disgrace and the burden of our country ; and though half the States of the Union, as well as a great part of Europe, have broken the fetters of the slave within their respective jurisdictions, yet it may fairly be questioned whether we are not furnishing as effectual encouragement to slavery as our ancestors did a century ago, when every colony here admitted the claim of the slaveholder. By the diversified channels of trade the system has struck its roots into every section of our country, as well as into the regions beyond the Atlantic. The slavery which we neither tolerate among ourselves, nor see with our own eyes, is upheld by our custom, and encouraged by our countenance.

There are, no doubt, many among us who hold both slavery

and the slave trade in abhorrence, and who may even adopt the language of the poet :

“I would not have a slave to till my ground—
To carry me—to fan me while I sleep,
And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth
That sinews, bought and sold, have ever earned,”

and yet continue to use and trade in the articles which are extracted from their toil, with very little reflection how far they are actually supporting a system which they unequivocally disapprove. To such as these the language may be addressed, and addressed in the most friendly manner, Come and let us reason together : not that we have any fine spun arguments to adduce, but because the suggestions of common sense and common honesty appear adequate to the case.

While we sincerely agree in the judgment that the practice of holding our fellow man in perpetual and hereditary bondage, is cruel and unjust; and, consequently, desire that our countrymen, who are in the practice, may be convinced of the evil and induced to abandon it; can we reasonably expect to exercise a salutary influence over them while we freely receive the products of slavery, and furnish the capital that supports it? If the holders of slaves find that those who profess to be conscientiously restrained from holding slaves themselves, or even hiring them of their masters to assist in their usual business, are willing to purchase of these masters, the products of their slaves' labor, when the very same commodities may be obtained through the labor of freemen, though at a little higher price, or of a quality somewhat inferior, what, let us seriously ask, will be the effect of such a discovery? Will they not say that such persons are preaching one thing and practising another? Will they not say that such are making it their interest to do the very things that they, themselves, are pronouncing to be wrong?

In the present refinements of society, a great part of the wealth which has been drawn from accumulated savings, owes its existence to the division of labor. The existing interchange between the planter, whose business is performed by servile hands, and the manufacturer, who purchases the products of his plantation and supplies the means of continuing the system, is little else than the division of labor, by which the different

employments are rendered more profitable than they would be if blended together.

A prophet describing the proceedings of his idolatrous countrymen, declared, the children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough—all innocent acts in themselves, but all tending to the same end—to make cakes to the queen of Heaven, and to pour out drink offerings to other gods. So in the case of negro slavery; the system consists of various portions, and the actors execute various parts, yet all tending to the same end—the encouragement and support of the institution.

While many of us admit, and boldly pronounce the injustice of slavery, it is obvious that few of us apply the same principles to the products of slave labor, which are usually, and by general consent, applied to other species of unlawful commerce. The honest trader would consider it a breach of integrity to purchase smuggled goods, knowing them to be such. Their inferior cost might furnish a motive, but not an excuse, for the act. Now will any man assert that, in a moral view, there is any comparison between depriving a man of his freedom, and defrauding the government of a portion of its revenue? Those who disallow of war, or, at least the Society of Friends, regard the purchase of prize goods as an unjustifiable participation in the profits of military plunder. But is not the product of slave labor also of the nature of military plunder? In our Yearly Meeting, a member is liable to disownment if he either holds slaves himself, or hires their services of their masters; and yet it would probably puzzle the shrewdest casuist to prove that a man is acting more criminally, or giving more efficient support to slavery, by cultivating his own farm by the labor of slaves, whom he might cause to be treated with all the mildness compatible with their condition, than by purchasing of another the commodities raised on his farm by the same kind of labor, exacted with the utmost rigor. Indeed, if humanity alone is to be consulted, we may reasonably conclude, that if Friends, and others of similar feelings toward the colored race, are to be supplied with certain articles, either wholly or in part, by the labor of slaves, it would be better for the slaves that they

should be under the guardianship of those for whose benefit they are toiling, than to be left in their usual condition.

Are we, then, to retrace the steps we have taken, and to introduce slavery among those who have cleared their hands of it? Nay, verily; but we are to carry out the principles which we fully approve. Among the articles of convenience, luxury or use, which are usually furnished by the labor of slaves, there are few, if any, which may not be obtained, in some instances, perhaps, at a little higher price, through the instrumentality of free labor. Why, then, do not the opponents of slavery afford their countenance and support to the market thus supplied? Can it be denied that the measure is innocent, and that, as far as it goes, it must be effectual? The limited demand which has hitherto existed, has brought into the market a considerable supply of cotton, sugar, &c.; and there can be no reasonable doubt that the supply would increase with an augmented demand.

There are at present established in Philadelphia, New York, Cincinnati and Mount Pleasant, stores exclusively devoted to the sale, by wholesale and retail, of goods, the product of free labor. These goods include all kinds of groceries, and nearly every description of dry goods. A supply of such goods is also kept for sale by friends of the cause at New Bedford, and Salem, Massachusetts, and at various other places.

It is an error to imagine that such a measure as the withdrawal of our custom from the slave grown commodities, even if rendered general among the advocates of emancipation, would produce distress to the masters, and suffering among the slaves. The consequence would be that emancipation would become the interest of the planters; and however desirable it would be that the possessors of slaves should liberate them on moral and religious grounds, it is not easy to perceive why we may not as justly make it their interest to emancipate them as to furnish the motive for continuing them in slavery.

Many of the improvements by which the world has been blessed, have been accomplished by those who commenced their labors in the morning of their day. And may we not indulge the hope that the youth of our day, instead of leaving this question where their fathers have left it, will adopt and perse-

veringly continue an effort to turn the streams of commerce into a channel which is unpolluted by oppression. The work is begun ; it remains for them to perfect it, and to prove that the air of the United States is too pure for a slave to breathe in.

Signed on behalf, and by direction of the Managers of the Philadelphia Free Produce Association of Friends.

Philadelphia, 10th mo., 15th, 1849.

SAMUEL RHOADS,
Secretary.

OFFICERS

OF THE

PHILADELPHIA FREE PRODUCE ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS.

1849.

SECRETARY.

GEORGE W. TAYLOR.

TREASURER.

MARMADUKE C. COPE.

MANAGERS.

ENOCH LEWIS,

ABRAHAM L. PENNOCK,

SAMUEL RHOADS,

EDWARD GARRETT,

JOHN FARNUM,

ELIHU PICKERING,

SAMUEL ALLINSON, JR.,

THOMAS WISTAR, JR.

CONSTITUTION

OF THE

PHILADELPHIA FREE PRODUCE ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS.

We believe that slaveholding is diametrically opposed to the whole spirit and tenor of the Christian religion, and that while it sustains the traffic in slaves, it is mainly supported by the traffic in and the consumption of the productions of slave labor. In order, therefore, to promote the use and facilitate the acquirement of goods supplied by free labor, we unite in an association under the title of the "PHILADELPHIA FREE PRODUCE ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS," and adopt for its government the following constitution.

ARTICLE I.

The Association shall consist of such members of the Religious Society of Friends as concur in the above views and purposes, and sign the constitution, or request their names to be entered on the list of members.

ARTICLE II.

The Association shall meet semi-annually in the city of Philadelphia, at such time and place as it may prescribe, or the managers, in the absence of such direction, shall appoint. It shall meet at other times by adjournment, or on the special call of the Board of Managers, or of any ten members.

ARTICLE III.

The officers of the Association shall be a Secretary, Treasurer, and Managers, to be appointed at the annual meetings.

ARTICLE IV.

The Secretary shall keep regular records of the proceedings of the Association.

ARTICLE V.

The Treasurer shall receive all moneys which may be contributed for promoting the objects of the Association, and pay them over to the order of the Association or of the Board of Managers ; keeping regular accounts thereof, to be laid before the Association at its annual meetings.

ARTICLE VI.

The Board of Managers shall consist of eight members, beside the Secretary and Treasurer, who shall be *ex-officio* members ; any five of whom shall form a quorum for the transaction of business. They shall have power to fill all vacancies that may occur in their body. They shall attend, under the instruction of the Association, to the promotion of the objects of the institution, and may adopt such rules, regulating their meetings and proceedings, as they shall deem expedient.

ARTICLE VII.

The Association shall aim to procure correct information of the condition of the countries with which we have commercial intercourse, in respect to free and slave labor, and the means of discriminating between their productions when they exist together ; and shall endeavor to ascertain and disseminate facts which show the injustice and destructiveness of human life connected with slave labor ; the impolicy of it ; and the duty of disconnecting ourselves from its support. It shall adopt means for obtaining a supply of such articles, the productions of free labor, as are not readily to be procured by individuals through the ordinary channels of commerce or manufactures.

ARTICLE VIII.

The Association shall correspond, by itself, or its Board of Managers, as occasion shall require, with such similar associations as may be established elsewhere ; or with persons interested in promoting the objects of the institution.

ARTICLE IX.

The Association shall encourage the formation of a fund by absolute contributions, or loans without interest, for the purpose of purchasing free cotton, and manufacturing it into fabrics, and for procuring other free goods, for which there may be occasion for making provision. Such fund shall be kept detached from all other moneys of the Association ; and so much of it as may be received on loan, shall be subject to a distributive proportion of any loss upon the whole amount, should such loss occur.

LIST OF FREE LABOR DRY GOODS AND GROCERIES,

Which are to be had by wholesale or retail of

GEORGE W. TAYLOR,

N. W. corner of Fifth and Cherry St., Philadelphia.

Brown and Bleached Muslins of various qualities and widths,
Brown, Bleached and Colored Drillings,
Brown, Bleached and Colored Canton Flannels,
Striped Cambrics and Satin Stripes,
Colored Cambrics—a variety of colors,
Paper Muslins, “ “
Ginghams, in great variety of style and quality,
Apron and Furniture Checks, Gingham Hdkfs.,
Prints—a large assortment of styles,
Ticking, Vest Padding, Cotton Laps, Wadding,
Table Diaper and Table Cloths, either all cotton or all linen,
Linen Doileys, Oil Cloths, Umbrellas,
Men's, Women's and Children's Stockings, in great variety, of Silk,
Wool and Cotton, from 12½ cts. to \$2 per pair,
Silk, Merino and Cotton Shirts and Drawers,
Knitting Cotton, unbleached, bleached and colored, of various Nos.,
Spool Cotton and Cotton Cord, white and colored,
Flannels, white and colored,
Cheese Swathing, or Strainer Cloth,
A handsome variety of Pantaloon Stuffs,
Gum Elastic Suspenders, at various prices, well made,
A good assortment of Linens and Linen Vestings,
Drillings, Hdkfs., Tapes, Sewing Thread, &c.,
Mouseline de Lains, plain and neatly figured,
Barages, Silks, Merinos, Silk Hdkfs., Cap Crape, &c. &c.

Particular attention is given to the selection of good Black and Green
Teas,
Coffee in great variety,
Loaf, Crushed and Pulverized Sugars,
Brown Sugars of various grades,
Syrup, Sugar House and West India Molasses,
Several kinds of Chocolate and Cocoa,
Confectionery and Spices, and a variety of other articles usually kept
by Grocers.